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Results of the professional preparation sections of the Modern Language Association (MLA) Cooperative Foreign Language Tests coupled with the findings of National Defense Education Act (NDEA) Institutes provide most of the background for these implications. Teacher ability to detect error in written and oral work and the correlation of language skills are mentioned. Remarks are also made about the necessity for better college and junior college programs for more efficiently trained high school students. (AF)

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IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION: RESULTS ON THE NEW FL TESTS

In any discussion of the new foreign language tests, one needs to go back, not to 1960, the year in which the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests were pre-tested as the MLA Qualifications Tests for Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages, but to 1955, the year in which the Statement of Qualifications for Secondary School Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages was formulated by the Steering Committee of the Foreign Language Program for the Modern Language Association. The statement established three general levels of proficiency (Superior, Good and Minimal) for seven areas of language teaching competence: aural understanding, speaking, reading writing, language analysis, culture, and professional preparation. Once the statement had been endorsed by the MLA Executive Council and the executive boards and councils of the national and regional associations concerned with the improvement of foreign-language teaching in our country, a rather complete overhaul of the whole language program at all levels of language learning was in order.

Strangely enough, the most radical changes in methods of language teaching in the late 1950's did not take place in the colleges and universities but in the secondary schools, where the traditional approach, stressing grammar and translation, gave way rather rapidly to the audiolingual approach, stressing aural comprehension and speaking. With the advent of the audiolingual approach, it soon became obvious that a large number of secondary school teachers lacked the basic qualifications for the audiolingual classroom, and a closer look revealed that they were lacking in other skills and abilities described in the MLA Statement of Qualifications as well.

With the passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958 and the organization of the first NDEA Summer Foreign Language Institutes, the overhaul in language curriculum and methodology began to take place seriously in schools of higher education. What has been accomplished so far?

Well, since 1958 more than 25,000 secondary and, more recently, elementary teachers have been brought into NDEA institutes, where a good many of them have been helped to develop competence in those aspects of the foreign language in which they were lacking. I say "a good many of them" because through the years there have been some teachers who have come to the institutes in a relatively bad state of preparation and have left in one that has not been very much better. By and large, however, the institutes have met with a great deal of success--so that with better qualified teaching staffs and somewhat generally longer foreign language sequences, high schools today are turning out a good many very able graduates.

These able graduates present greater problems of articulation between secondary school and college than have previously existed. It has long been assumed that one year of study at the high school level was equivalent to one semester of study at the college level--and since the average high school graduate formerly entered college with two years of language study to his credit, he was simply assigned to an intermediate language course.

But consider this: While college students tested at the end of two semesters of study with the new MLA Cooperative Foreign Language Tests obtain score distributions similar to those obtained by high school students completing two years of study, college students completing four semesters of study, i.e., completing the language requirement, obtain score distributions similar to those obtained by high school students completing only their third year of study. High school students completing four years of high school study do considerably better.

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What is to be done with these high school students with three and four years of high school study who come to the colleges with better preparation than students who have had all their preparation at the college level? Should colleges permit them to enter third year language classes? Not many colleges do. Some colleges permit them to enter third semester classes, but many colleges still give a maximum of one year of credit for high school study. And if colleges are generous in the credit they give these students, what are they going to do with students completing Advanced Placement programs who deserve even more credit?

This presents a serious problem to four-year colleges and it breeds another serious problem for junior colleges. What kind of language program should the junior college present? Certainly not the old basic language requirement program with a literature course or two thrown in for good measure--but very likely language courses approximating closely those offered now to third and fourth year college students.

More emphasis needs to be given to the development of greater speaking competence on the part of the prospective teacher. True, the trend is in that direction, but many teachers are still going into secondary school classrooms--and elementary school classrooms--to try to equip students with audiolingual skills that they do not themselves possess. They must be--because the tapes recorded at the NDEA institutes show how low their competence is.

Another opportunity to check on teacher competency in speaking has presented itself when professional scorers have rated tapes that have previously been rated by classroom teachers. With a maximum possible score of 82 on the MLA Cooperative speaking tests, the scores assigned by professional scorers average about 20 points lower than those assigned by the teachers. When the discrepancies are located, they are usually in sections on which judgment has to be made on the basis of accuracy of pronunciation. The ears of many secondary school teachers are just not sufficiently attuned to discern fine differences in language sounds.

While it is generally assumed that the good speaker of a foreign language is also a good listener, the test results show that this is not necessarily so. While the correlations between speaking and listening scores for the various languages are not low, neither are they high enough to permit the prediction with a high degree of certainty of competence in one of these skills as a result of knowing something about the degree of competence in the other. Practice in the development of competence in each of these skills apparently needs to be provided for its own sake.

Interestingly, the test results show for all languages higher correlations between listening and speaking. In other words, ability to understand the spoken language is more closely related to ability to read it than it is to ability to speak it. For the test batteries for all languages except Russian the correlations between listening and reading are exceeded only by those between reading and writing. For Russian the intercorrelation for reading and writing is the lowest one shown for the four skills.

The test results indicate that college curricula in the different foreign languages, like college curricula in English, do not make adequate allowance for work with the development of skill in writing. And, strangely enough, this is the area of competence in which there is frequently least improvement shown between pretests and posttests at the NDEA institutes. Somehow it seems to be taken for granted that if one can understand, speak, and read the language, he can perforce, write it. Perhaps he can--but frequently not very well!

Perhaps the reason that more emphasis is not put on writing is that courses in writing are hard to teach and the reading of written work is laborious and time-consuming. Provision should be made, however, in the training of language majors who plan to teach for the development of sufficient competency to enable them to detect errors in spelling, grammar, and structure in student compositions if they can do no more. Their editing of the student composition which makes up the interlinear

section of the writing test in the MLA teacher battery shows that many have not acquired this competency.

In the early years of the NDEA institutes, teachers entered the institutes with a limited understanding of the similarities and differences in the sound system, forms and structures of the foreign language and English--an understanding that the teacher needs to have in order to know the difficulties the American child will encounter in the learning of the foreign language. In those days the difference between pretest and posttest scores on the applied linguistics tests was great--and the six to eight weeks of instruction at the institute added significantly to the teachers' knowledge in that area. Today while the difference between pretest and posttest scores is still large, both scores are sufficiently higher to indicate that teachers do come to the institutes knowing a little more of the science and leave the institutes knowing a little more of it than they did formerly.

It is difficult to interpret results on the civilization and culture tests in terms of competence in this area because of the different interpretations given by different members of the profession to the competence that the MLA Statement of Qualifications describes as "an enlightened understanding of the foreign people and their culture, such as is achieved through personal contact, through travel and residence abroad, through study of systematic description of the foreign culture, and through study of literature and arts." The particular interpretation of the statement favored by the test authors is reflected in the various forms of the tests. The earlier forms of the tests were made up predominantly of items requiring the examinees to identify furniture styles, buildings, artists, writers, and political figures--and to show some knowledge of the geography and history of the country. The latest form of the tests in all languages except Russian places greater emphasis on the understanding of how the geography and history of the country and the cultural patterns of the people through the ages are related to the contemporary civilization of the people.

As far as can be determined on the basis of test scores for the 1965 institutes, in which an older form and the newest form of the test were spiraled, tests of the latter type present slightly greater difficuluty to teachers. However, the pretest and posttest scores for 1965 were so similar to scores for previous years that one might conclude that most teachers who have an understanding of culture with a large "C" are the same teachers who have an understanding of culture with a small "c." Is this the result of formal instruction in college courses or of wide reading and travel or residence abroad--or of a combination of these?

Finally, I would like to say something about implications for higher education insofar as the actual preparation for the teaching role is concerned. The MLA Statement of Qualifications indicates that the teachers should have a knowledge of the presentday objectives of the teaching of foreign language as communication and an understanding of the methods and techniques for attaining these objectives--plus knowledge of the use of specialized techniques, such as audio-visual aids, and of the relation of language teaching to other areas of the curriculum--plus a mastery of recognized teaching methods, evidence of breadth and depth of professional outlook, and the ability to experiment with and evaluate new methods and techniques. This is certainly a large order when the preparation every teacher should have in child development, educational psychology, educational philosophy, cultural anthropology, learning theory, motivation, measurement and evaluation, and the like, is added to it. Foreign language specialists in teacher training need to carry to their colleagues in the liberal arts colleges who are also preparing teachers and to the teachers in the behavioral disciplines which furnish the statements that go to make up "the body of knowledge unique to the profession of education" their conviction that there is a body of knowledge that is particularly unique to the field of foreign language education--for there truly is such a body and foreign language teachers need to be competent in it.

With the professional preparation test an attempt has been made to get at an evaluation of the fund of knowledge that the teacher has about what is going on in the profession. Test scores give evidence that, by and large, foreign language teachers who have been educated in this country or who have had several years of experience teaching in this country do have some familiarity with new curricula, new materials, and new methods when they enter the NDEA institutes and that they leave them with a much greater awareness of these things. As might be expected, native speakers of the various languages who have been educated in their own countries are not so familiar with recent innovations in foreign language teaching as are their American compeers although they are extremely competent in the language itself. Does this imply that special methods courses for native speakers need to be offered by schools of higher education? So it would seem.

One cannot, of course, with the professional preparation test of the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests or any other test predict how the teacher is going to perform in the classroom situation. Those concerned with the development of the tests do not pretend that the tests will do this and the test results should not be interpreted as doing so. When one comes right down to it, there is nothing about the battery of MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests that will provide 100 per cent foolproof evidence about how a teacher will perform in the classroom. The test results do, however, furnish some evidence as to which teachers, possessing the right kinds of values and attitudes and a kind of teacher personality, are competent to do the job if all other attributes are operating in favor of it. And they do furnish some evidence as to where schools of higher education can look for ways of doing a better job of encouraging this competence.